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LAWRENCE RUSSELL

BLACKOUT

A MONOLOGUE

I had my first blackout in 1955...and when I came to I found myself in the trunk of a black Cadillac sedan. (pause) We travelled some miles through the woods and then came to a farmhouse. (pause) I could see a panel truck...it looked like a Dodge, the kind they use to transport meat from the country to the city...(pause) Some situation. As I lay there peering thru the crack I reflected upon the meaninglessness of existence, the deep rotten centre which keeps us wet and slimy within its evil. How is it that we must suffer such things as say cancer? (pause) Several people whom I've met have died from this disease. The first was married to a relative. He wore suits with long lapels...I can see him now leaning against the iron railings with his back to the sea...a cigarette hanging from his lower lip, of course. Seems to me he developed a craving for ice cream. (pause) His name was Bertie. (pause) Another victim was a student in astronomy but maybe my uncle's first wife is a more interesting case. She had both her breasts removed within a year of her marriage and she didn't last much longer than that. So if I have anything to be thankful for, it's the blackout, since it involves no pain, no sensation of any sort, certainly nothing like cancer.

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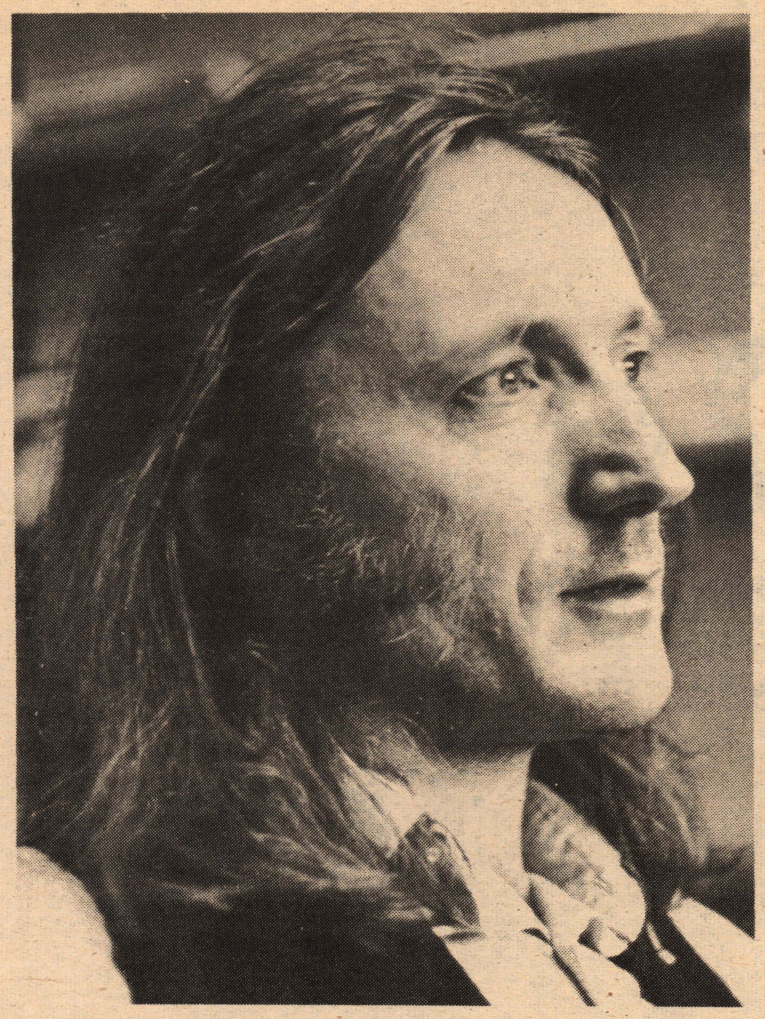


But without sensation, I wouldn't know where in the hell I am. The sensation of travelling west is so much more important and splendid than travelling east. (pause) The farmyard was diming in the twilight. (pause) Now that I had come to, would I feel any pain? No suffering please. I don't want to suffer. (pause) When I was removed from the trunk and led into the kitchen of the farmhouse I was offered a hot drink. It didn't take an expert to recognize the smell of boot polish. (pause) Everything became highly lucid. The leader of the Jews motioned that the offerings should be withdrawn. I wanted to know why my clothes were wet and my shoes clogged with ice cream. One of the lieutenants replied that they had found me floating in the river.

A blackout is not like sleep. There is no dream to haunt you. In the interval between the last one and this one I became the lead actor in a series of spy thrillers for a British movie company. I was cast in quite a number of sexual scenes with a series of beautiful women. You might even see one of my roles on the Late Show tonight. My philosophy in this period was: if you conquer the lovescenes, you win everything. Notice my total sincerity as I kiss the beautiful shivering lips. You must have sincerity. Unless you have sincerity in the love scenes, all is lost.

Afterwards I was thrown into a small cell and told to think things over and come to my sense. There were rats in the walls so I didn't sleep for 72 hours...and when I did sleep, I dreamed of cancer...despair and bitterness...(pause) From there on in it was a matter of discipline. I would not sleep. I would not...and sooner or later I would blackout. Since no one brought me any food, I thought blackout was certain. But then I was visited by a young woman at dawn. She knelt down where I lay and murmered, your hair is turning white...why do you grieve so? The smell of boot polish was powerful...and the gray rat perched on my foot drained me of whatever dim fascination I was capable of. Nevertheless, I had to respond to this woman, because, even then, I sensed I had to win in the love scenes. Are you a Jewess, I said, I mean, can I trust you? Look, she said softly, it wouldn't matter who I was...you'd still want to screw me, wouldn't you?

(pause) If I had to draw a picture of this lady, i would copy the goddess you sometimes find engraved on the Ace of Spades.

They talk, you listen. That's the way it is. Personally I've always found them incredibly aggressive. They tell you their message is from the stars. You kneel. All the time you are kneeling. The Queen of Spades walks back and forth and tells you everything is under control. The fact that she is a good-looking babe for the time being deludes you into accepting all this poetic bullshit.

I was unable to establish the connection. I stared at the rats. Several days passed. I did not sleep. (pause) Once more I was brought before the leader of the Jews. Once more one of his lieutenants did the speaking. It was immediately announced that I was wanted for murder. A brief report was read out which described how I had slain an Egyptian on a sand dune near the pyramids. In all respects I fitted the description of the killer...yet how did I explain the fact that I looked like an Egyptian myself? The lieutenant inferred that maybe the whole incident was a fake. (pause) I starred in the movie **Storm Over the Nile** sometimebetweenthe blackout of 1961 and the blackout of 1965. In one scene I became blind from wandering around in the desert sun. I consider this my greatest role. Blindness came to me as a completely natural state. I made love to several beautiful Victorian ladies without the aid of eyes. Many of these scenes were omitted from the final version but the director insisted on shooting them anyway. (pause) I owe this genius a lot for my present state of thinking. He had a black Cadillac sedan which he drove to all the locations. I can see the flabby bastard in the back seat jerking off right now. The real thing, he would pant, I have the real thing. I stage the scene, I shoot the scene, I am the realizer of the real thing.

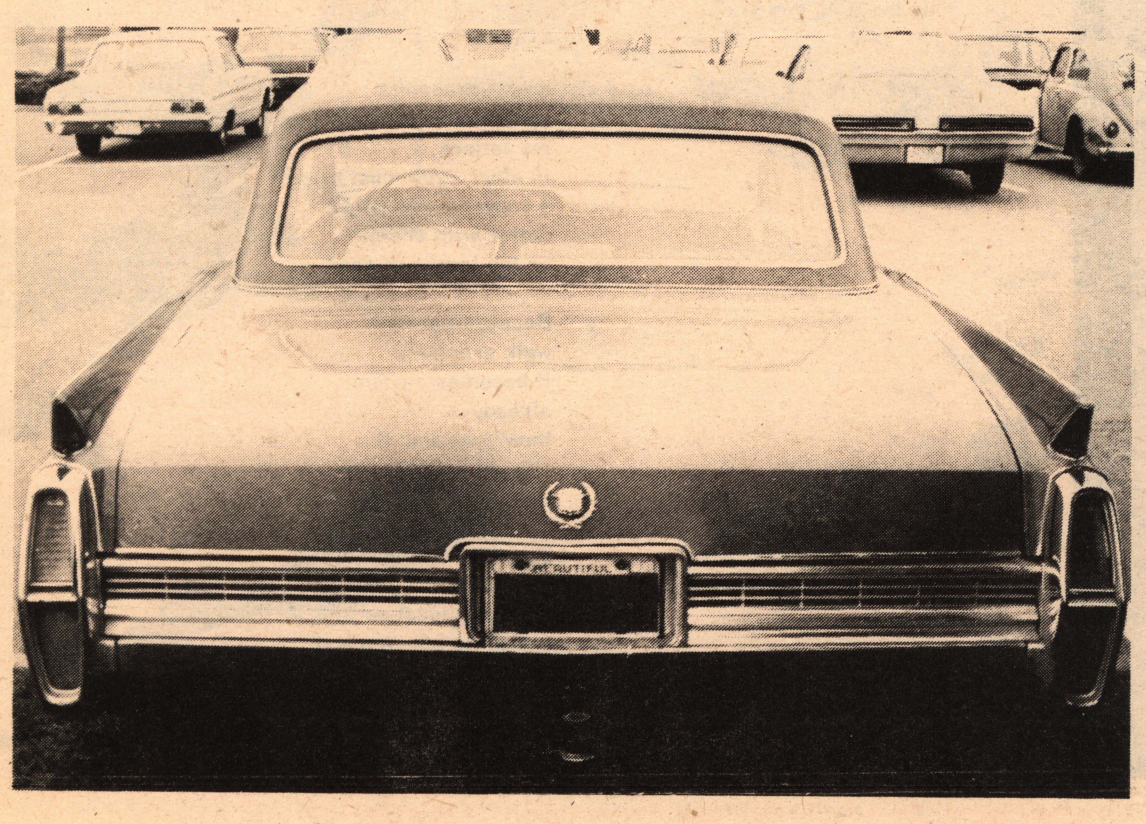
The kitchen contained a great choice of weapons...altho of course none were mine to choose. Near the stove were several boxes of grenades and the table was organized as a display area for several types of rifles, sub-machine guns and revolvers. Along the west wall a bench had been set up with familiar-looking laboratory apparatus...and I assumed it was for the manufacture of explosive chemicals. The lieutenant soon picked up on my casual interest and bade me go and look into the microscope. Two of the band had to support me. (pause) It was certainly not what I had expected to see...although the sight was all too familiar. Yes, said the lieutenant, we had hoped to have the great Einstein turn his attention to this problem...(pause) I was shaking. The lieutenant motioned to another Jew and said give the Egyptian an injection. The order was carried out. I gazed at the leader's pale and holy face but he made no sign. I now knew that blackout was certain...and that incredible agony was also certain.

At night the rats came and climbed into my pockets. I expected a visit from the Jewess but there was nothing doing. In the early hours I dragged myself to the viaduct and stared at the reddened sky. A large Phoenix flew past, bearing its nest towards Heliopolis and the temple of the sun. (pause) Then came release. I was taken to the kitchen and given a

good breakfast of bacon and eggs. I refused nothing. In an upstairs room I was bathed and circumsized and given an impressive uniform. I drifted in a dreamy reverie from one scene to the next. In the Dodge panel truck was a machine gun nest. I witnessed a couple of executions but was informed by the lieutenant that the victims were merely plastic dummies. (pause) We strolled together across the yard. We have decided to accept your story, he said, so you are free to go...and, by the way, there's an exercise taking place at the moment...you'll find dummies such as these in the woods and further west.

Beyond the cool solitude of the woods lies the desert. Needless to say I became delirious after a few days of aimless wandering...but no more delirious than I was after giving the Jewess the gun. Listen I said to her I never really gave you the gun before but this time I'm really gonna give it to you...I'm really gonna give you the gun. (pause) Lovely warm woman. Lovely wet and warm and wet.

Some desert. The Cadillac was full of lizards. Then the set of tracks going up the mountain. (pause) There is no need for me to confess the place of my birth...I'm not sure where it is. It could be Athens. It could be the trunk of a Cadillac travelling west...as it was this time. What seems important to me is the reoccurring series and the size of my memory although maybe this means next to nothing to you. But cancer does. You know what I mean. An incredibly cruel preparation for your next role. None of it makes any sense until you realize as I do that one blackout only precedes another and there is no relief only diversion. I might see Bertie again. I might. But then I might not. I have never seen anyone again. (pause) I found their bodies at the top near the oracle. It looked to me as though the leader had shot the Jewess first and then put the gun to his own head...although I was in no condition to decide if they were plastic dummies or not. (pause) I came close to the oracle and knelt down, preparing my questions. The murmer of the sacred fire lulled me into a trance and everything seemed benign...but pointless. I placed the barrel to my head. (pause) The voice was clear and unmistakable: listen to me, for I am the **only** living thing.



Psyche's Song

Perhaps it doesn't matter now --
You've gone away for good.
I wouldn't snatch you back again
Even if I could...

You were the perfect poem, - the Dream, -
Perhaps you don't exist;
I **saw** you, - at **least** I made you **seem**, -
D'you remember when we kissed?

Stay far away and far away -
You always will be near;
For I am just another day
And I am never here...

Peter Russell

AT THE CONFERENCE TABLE

Capitalizing
on the monotony of this conversation
I write this poem
on capitalization

My mind turns
all sorts of puns--tickertape, pedestals,
an eternal beginning of sentences...
a jail.

Which is the jail?
This conversation? Bars of stock reports?
A pedestal prison?
No--to always begin,

Begin, begin, begin,
and never continue. And now
I cannot even
finish this poem...

Jim Roberts

SNOWSCAPES

by derk wynand

Snow piled
in grey layers
grey
over grey
right to the waist.

Thus we recall
winter.

Each time we bend
we find ash
find sand
locked into snow
with our footprints.

Thus we recall
our winter pursuits.

Bent like that
come March or April
we eye the bellies
of our women our
teachers of line
and colour and form.

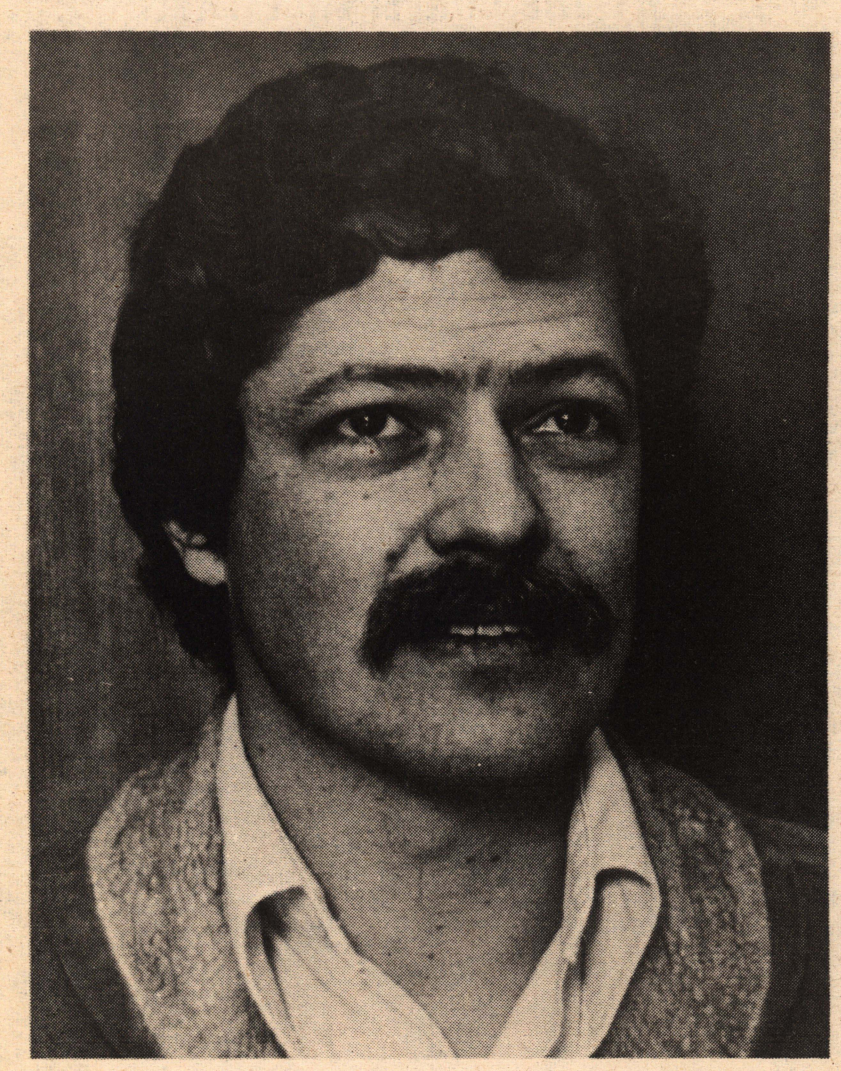
Time signals reach us
even here in the polar region.
We add what we read
in the constellations
and what we learn of the sun
by reading our shadows.

Hour by hour we discover
by addition
where the hours lead us.

That much is obvious,
that much known.

For the rest,
we try to conclude,
put an end to measuring
planet or star,
but the signal remains.

We read it, we read it,
we know who we are.



Here
wolves hunt in packs,
men in pairs.

Crippled deer
scent the air,
a bitter perfume.

The deer strip bark
from saplings,
the wolves strip flesh
from the deer,
and the men...

no,
I will not draw
your conclusions.

Whatever happens here
happens when it is snowing.
Whatever happens now,
you will find
no trace
by the time you arrive.

In that snowy field
the message lies buried
just below the surface.

Everyone can hear it.
It was written for all.
If only we put
our heads together
we'd quickly find it.

It is not buried deep.
It is not so loud
the echoes confuse.

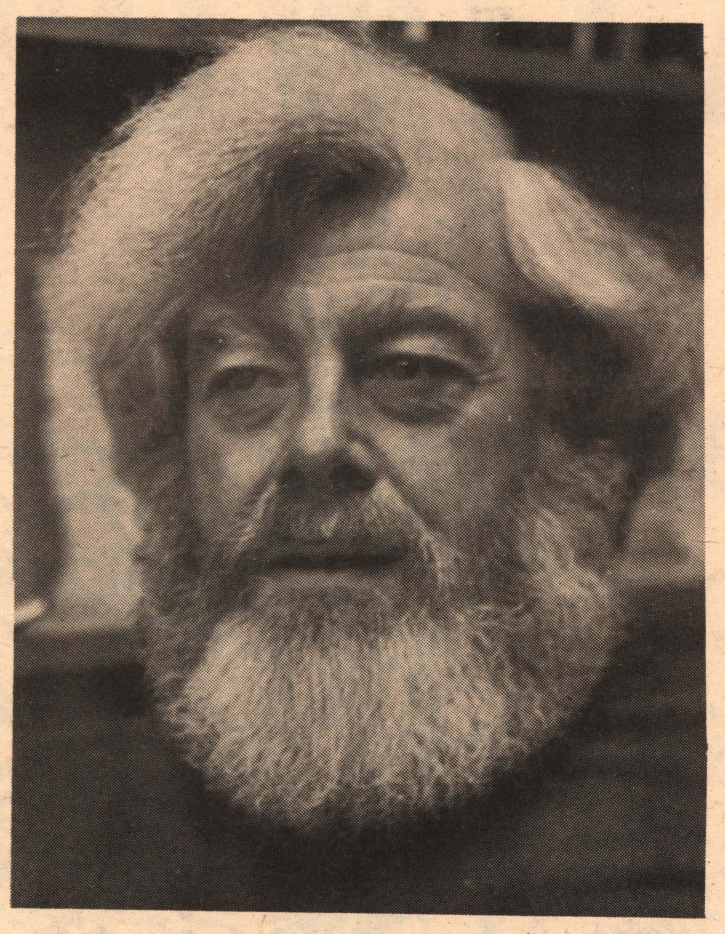
But already the leaders
roll great snowballs
before them.
Already they build
a wall around it
and from its top
shout loud to drown
the lone voice out.

Everyone likes to think
the children still hear it,
but the children do not hear it.

This white patch
spoiled already by
my letters,
in other eyes must be
a snow-covered field
dotted with crows
or the tracks of deer.

Because the deer
walk precisely,
it becomes a poem:
already
their feet sign it
"Snowscape"
and leave it to you.

Should you ever find it,
quick, note
the exact location
and write me, Wynand,
before the tracks melt
and the deer move on
to higher ground.



FOUR SNOWMEN AND A FIFTH

By

Peter Russell

There are woods and trees, dead sticks, and snow, and it is damp;
Against the dark background of the forest a man is walking.
He is tall in a long grey cloak and stalking, he slouches up,
He has a reddish nose, his tongue lolls like a swinging lamp,
His hat is black, and the mouth on his white face like a moustache is turning grey.
He is a rogue, or the Archangel, or Baudelaire, or God -
There's a red glow spread on the white of his face, and a pipe in his clay mouth,
Or perhaps there is not; a clod, I am alone, *yet we are four*
Irritable children sitting on the nursery floor.

This rogue or ruffian, tramp or beggar or God
Rolls like a drunk Russian, a vodka spirit by day,
Into this scene on the dark stage, stark, staring from winter's page
And sidles into the middle, shouts in his Irish rage:
"I tread on the white, the Light; I tread on the black.
Sand and the rivers, blow! Summer and sun come back!"
And the pools in the woods shine silver, the beech and the birch and oak, -
Red biddy the dawn has spoken: *What does it mean? We are four*
Shivering full-length snowmen square on the forest floor.

"I tread on the white, the Light; I tread on the black.
Sand and the rivers, blow! Sun and summer come back!"
And the white snowman in the top left corner of page
Droops, and he crumples a little, an old man grey in his age;
And the one on the left of me, (I'm on the bottom right),
Falls on his elbow, twists, - gyrates, - a rotating stick,
Dripping and dropping, deliquescent, sagging - a blubbing old statuette,
A white grey ghost on his elbow, a dying Gaul with the sweat
Running in blue-grey ripples off brow and shoulder and back;
And I feel like a sack collapsing, older, dwindling away... *We are four*
Dissolving ghosts in a puddle, wetting the nursery floor.

The white of the glistening forest fades to a frosty graphite grey -
The top right hand snowman has rolled on his Roman side - away,
To a pool in the mud and sticks, a pearly patch in the wove
Of a frayed old Turkey carpet we played on, just fifty years ago.
But strange, - like the dawn, - there's a shimmering roseate glow
Bleeding across the forest tinting the sky and the snow,
That turns to the red of blood, sweet wine that sticks to the paws,
Pink cheeks and shoulders, bare knees (all prone), - *Of course! We are four*
Bodiless babes that smoulder, - seeds on the nursery floor.

It seemed that our nanny or someone had played us some schoolmistress trick
Forcing us infants (poor kids!) to join in some giddy-goat game,
A vacuous dumb-show for tumblers who leap to a liftedstick,
A fatuous ring-a-rose nonsense, meaningless, always the same.
I groaned like a lump ground down, a weight on myshoulders like lead,
In squid-like invisible arms that twisted me slowly around
In a downwards expanding spiral, a sundial in autumn covered with leaves pale and dead,
Faint trace of the spinning aeon, the scattered hand of a clock...
Unresisting, sodden, I felt myself succumb - heard the voice of a ruffian mock,
An insolent Rimbaud intruding, a sneering and poisonous sound:
"I is another, you is *you, - contemptible* imbeciles *four,*
Wrestling and flopping defeated, fouling your nursery floor."

Fury, impotence, hysterical rage seized me then -
A formless deposit deprived of muscle and brain-power I writhed;
Recalling that action, - that *action*, prerogative owed by men
To their very nature was due, - "Wearenot grass that is scythed!"
I struggled in vain, a handless and armless trunk, for sword, or for ink and for pen,
But no! Was I drunk? - only screaming, and icy and colourless wind, -
A frosty monotone pitch in my guttering eardrums sang;
Jaws locked, speech frozen - tetanus-speech, - and then the telephone rang:
The forest a livid vermilion, - the dawn wind lifted my hand;
And somebody said: "Is it you?" *"Help me!"* I said, *"I am four*
Sprawling slimy abortions spread on the nursery floor."

The blood-red flame of the forest had paled to sickly green....
The voice on the line was pleading: "I want to see you now."
But how could I, - no more than a liquid vomit - a stain on the carpet, be *seen?*
Then words not my own, words thrown up like a meal, where my gullet once had been
Oozed from my mouth and took form: "Meet me at twelve o'clock,
Noon midnight, equinox solstice, at the crossroads outside the town, -
I'll be there, don't be late!" and I put the receiver down...
And the sky was an apple-green, Earth a bright Angel, and - zooks!
The soiled carpet a meadow in flower, in seed and in fruit, *and we four*
Four tall golden stooks in the sun, (and the threshers, gathering, come
With their ox-hide, winnowing fans and their flails) - *where there'd been but a nursery floor.*

ALTERATIONS FOR MANET

I am
one of your three
naked women

I establish roundness
roundness
roundness

I am the color
orange
the reds & yellows
you squeeze & twist
to give body
to your dying images
of cantelopes & summer trees

Dejeuner sur l'herbe
indeed
you give me
form
to challenge
the angle of your hat
the shade of grey
in your piano fingers

I have occupied this yellow square
paced its color thin
as winter's edge

The sun
demands a new shape
A thirst
for the crimson taste

Anonymous

THOU AND I

Ask who I am! I am the bear
Who bore a fair young girl child off
Into his lair, and yet,
Trapped in a virgin's snare,
Her toils and her net -
He never harmed her.

I am the maple shivering in the dawn
Leaves wet and ragged, holed and torn,
For yesterday is Autumn, sunlight's slow drunkenness,
Tomorrow was the Spring, that hurries...

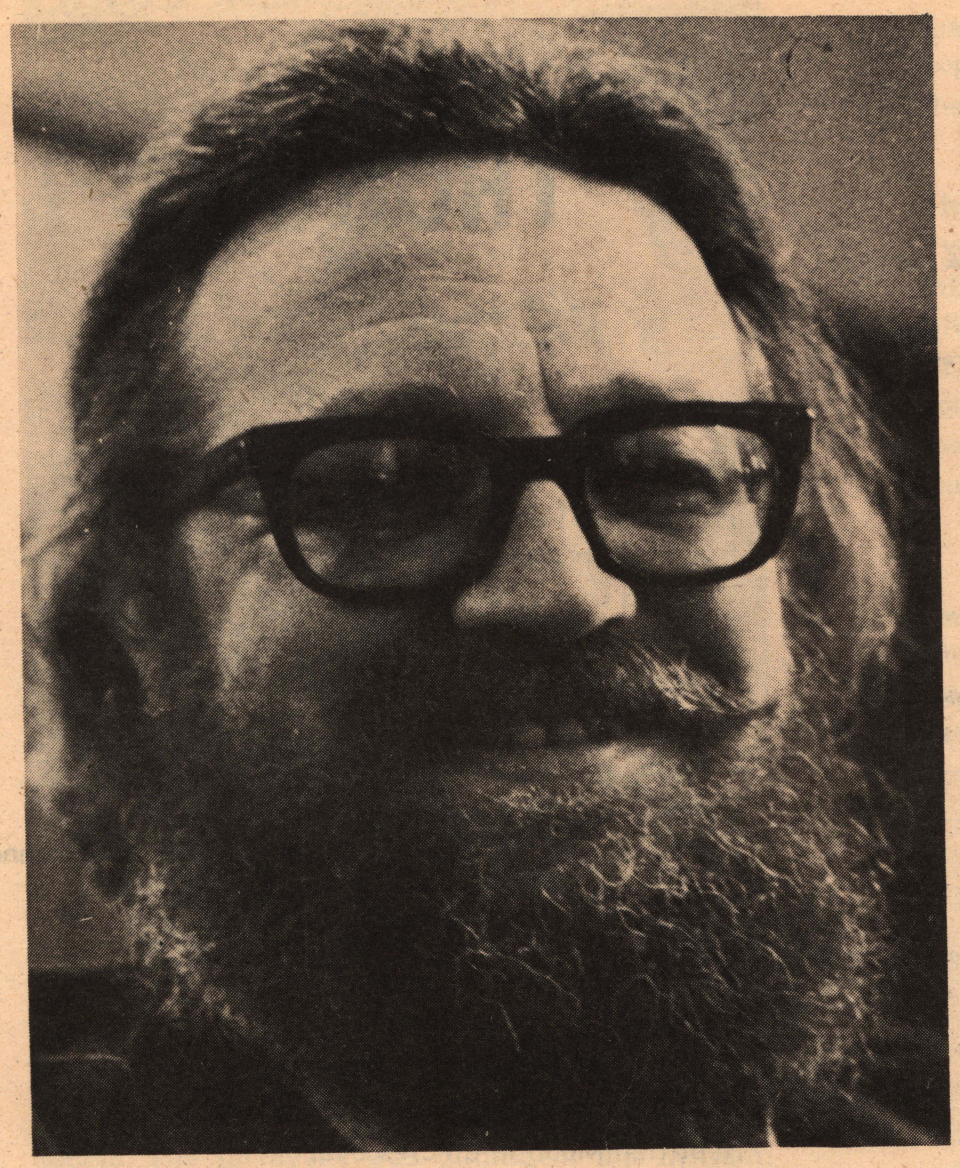
I am the moon that's madness for the male,
Bland disk of stone sterility
That smiles with neuter smile beyond the pale
Of quick mortality that talks like me.
Reptilian Moon in circles bear
Ocean and tide, your cold ploughshare,
In woman's breast and womb, till there
You make a cavern underneath the sea
In which two souls, contrary, prisoners be...

Yet I am I -- once almost christened Psyche -
Who longed to see her unseen winged lover.
Her hidden lamp -- the darkness to discover -
Sharp knife beneath her cloak, one drop of oil -
No coiling serpent nor no scaly dragon
Was there to see -
Only the godlike, innocent body...

Mysterious vehicle, celestial wagon,
Fixed in the stellar movement like a jewel,
Constant Arcturus whom the Plough
Nightly turns round - windlass, angelic fuel, -
The sacrificial hymn of I and Thou,
Order itself, the Unity of Dual,
The Unicorn's stern vow...

For I am Virgin too,
Though bull and bear and ram
And pericarp and tree, -
As effortless, - bright flame! - I circle You,
The fabled moth, -- I AM.
And You, adored, advance and then retreat,
(Daphne with footsteps fleet
Or Syrinx light as reed),
Utter inviolability -- the Sea,
Encircling me.....

Peter Russell



Chakrata (India)

I have been there:
the cold mountain
pines drippy with
black rain,
the hard-mouthed ponies,
the straw-faced
visitors with
their rag bundles...

To have been there
is to have been
alive, and to be
alive still.
Memory proves us.
We perform
acts to remember,
thin as mist,

guessing at mountains
that are mountains
only because we have seen
or dreamed
their black pines,
their straw-faced
visitors with
sapphires, diamonds.

The Ante-Room

First the binding,
then the rending,
offering the body
to be burned;
first the forest,
then the fangs,
giving up the mortal blood.

Standing in that
place of vision,
my bones stones
around my feet,
my blood rivers,
my heart carrion,
every wall is wet with sweat.

Questions will not
come, or answers;
night on night
the place returns,
every wall
and every window
covered by that moving skin

through which the morning
pierces phantoms
that the music may begin.

by Robin Skelton

copywright Robin Skelton 1973